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SUBJECT: KURDISTAN ISLAMIC UNION MAINTAINS A MODERATE, INDEPENDENT
STANCE

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CLASSIFIED BY: Scott Dean, Regional Coordinator (Acting), Reo
Kirkuk, Department of State .
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. The Kurdistan Islamic Party (KIU) hopes to be a viable option for Kurdish voters that are not satisfied with what they perceive to be the corrupt, self-serving policies of the KDP and PUK. KIU officials reportedly reject violence in the name of Islam and argued that the Iraqi Government needed to work better with Islamic parties to control Islamic fanaticism. The KIU expected more KDP and PUK attacks in the future but hoped to remain a "peaceful opposition party". Recently, the Kurdish Alliance formally requested that the KIU rejoin its bloc, but the KIU was unwilling to compromise their political independence without receiving concessions from the PUK and KDP. The KIU receives a small budget from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) but is unwilling to accept funds directly from the PUK or KDP. The KIU has no special relations with the Kurdistan Islamic Group and rejected the recent fatwa to kill author Meriwan Halabja as extremism. The KIU representatives indirectly responded to a question regarding their views on Sharia law by stating the KIU voted for the Constitution. End Summary.

(SBU) KURDISTAN ISLAMIC UNION - A VOICE of moderation

12. (C) On 1 March 2006, IAPO's met with members of the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), including Kirkuk chief and Central Committee member Muhammad Karim, deputy chief of Kirkuk Abd al-Qadir Zagold, and Kirkuk Provincial Council member Ibrahim Khalil Rashid. The KIU representatives said their party rejected all violence in the name of Islam and would never accept one Iraqi sect to impose its will on the others. They pointed out that their party was the first Iraqi Islamic group to publicly denounce Ansar al-Sunna's Islamic ideology as too extreme - a move that greatly enhanced the KIU as a terrorist target. The KIU representatives argued that the Iraqi Government needed to work with Islamic parties to control Islamic fanaticism. They believe their party must continue to be a viable option for Kurdish voters that are not satisfied with the often corrupt, self-serving policies of the KDP and PUK.

13. (C) Karim claimed the KIU was able to earn five seats on the national Council of Representatives because it did not represent a sect and had a creative governance plan for Iraq's future. According to Karim, Allawi's group responded favorably

to their governance plan and wanted to meet to discuss its contents, but nothing yet had materialized. The KIU's plan in the short-term could be summarized as: first, prioritize security as a means to implement civil projects; second, treat all groups and parties equally; third, work to remove the term "occupier" from the Iraqi vernacular and coordinate with the Coalition to improve its treatment of Iraqis; and fourth, improve minority rights and mitigate the persecution of minorities by dominant Iraqi groups. Karim argued that Iraq could not fight its enemies with force, only ideology.

14. (C) The KIU representatives stated their support of civil rights and emphasized that its key platform was anti-corruption in northern Iraq. The KIU prefers technocrats with "clean hands" to hold government positions. In reference to the role Sharia law should play in governance, the KIU representatives indirectly answered that they had voted in favor of the current Constitution draft. Karim added that his party supported the Constitution because it was moderate on civil and human rights. Karim said the KIU denied the fatwa issued by Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG) official Abd al-Qadir Said to kill Meriwan Halabja, because he authored the controversial book, "Sex, Islamic Law, and Women." The KIU position was clear in that it supported the KRG Ministry of Culture to deal with this "problem" according to the law. The KIU representatives said their party had no special relations with the KIG other than the two parties were political counterparts in northern Iraq. Karim then asked whether the Embassy would release a statement condemning Halabja's book out of respect to Iraqi Muslims. He seemed puzzled as to why the USG would not release a definitive opinion on the controversy.

(SBU) THE PRICE OF POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE

15. (C) Recently, the Kurdish Alliance formally requested that the KIU rejoin its bloc, but the KIU responded that it would

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only unite if the Kurdish Alliance agreed to KIU demands that include funding for special projects and increased political representation in the Kurdish Regional Government. The Kurdish Alliance response has been to threaten KIU resources in the Kurdistan region. Additionally, the KIU delegation has not been invited to many of the discussions regarding national government formation in Baghdad. They complained that the U.S. Ambassador had not invited the KIU, while Mithal al-Alusi's party (with only one seat) had been involved in the negotiations.

16. (C) The KIU had expected some repercussions from the KDP and PUK when it decided to split from the Kurdish Alliance but never anticipated attacks on their buildings or the targeting of their officials. Karim said the KIU expected more attacks in the future but hoped to remain a peaceful opposition party in the Kurdish Regional Government. He was confident that the Kurdish Alliance was likely to dismiss the KIU from positions and opportunities in the KRG but claimed the KIU was willing to lose all it possessed to exercise its democratic rights.

17. (C) The KIU receives a small budget from the KRG and relies on donations from its members. The KIU reportedly refuses to accept money directly from the KDP or PUK, because it would compromise their independence. KIU party members that earned salary from their political positions returned a large percentage of those earnings to the party. For example, each of the five KIU members on the national Council of Representatives kept only \$400 of his \$10,000 monthly salary. Rashid requested that the U.S. support the KIU because it was vulnerable to the KDP and PUK's dominance in northern Iraq. When questioned about possible international funding sources the KIU members became visibly uncomfortable.

Biographic Notes

18. (C) The KIU in 2003 presented a post-war plan to the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, who liked the plan and, as a result, gave KIU leader Salah al-Din Baha al-Din a seat on the 25 member Governing Council. The three representatives at the current meeting had the appearance of western businessmen and seemed genuine in their statements to promote civil projects and curb corruption in the north. KIU Kirkuk chief and Central Committee member Muhammad Karim clearly was the top KIU official in the meeting; he sat between his two colleagues and did most of the talking. The KIU representatives appeared sincere in their call for greater civil and human rights, and it is plausible that the KIU will gain more traction in northern Iraq if it holds fast to its image of anti-corruption and demands for greater accountability from the two dominant Kurdish parties.

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